

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. DURBIN. I ask the Senator from Ohio if I might be given permission at this point to speak for up to 10 minutes and then yield the floor to him.

Mr. DEWINE. I yield to my colleague for 10 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Illinois.

109TH CONGRESS FINAL WEEK

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I agree with my colleague, the Democratic leader, Senator REID. We spend a lot of time making speeches in the Senate. Elected officials and Government officials and politicians across America speak a lot to the American people. The American people have an opportunity once every 2 years to speak to us. On November 7 the American people spoke to the Members of Congress. The message was very clear. It was a message calling for change and new direction.

Equally important, it was a message from the American people to the Members of the Senate and the House, stop the infighting, roll up your sleeves, do your work, get your work done, and do something to help America, help the families across America, who count on you to be responsive to the costs of health insurance, the cost of gasoline, the issues that confront us in America.

That was the message of November 7, a message of change. And there will be changes in Congress as a result of that election. That is why it was such a surprise for us to return to Washington at the end of this session and to hear the Republican leadership in the House and the Senate announce that, frankly, they were going to adjourn without doing their work.

The Republican leaders in the Senate and the House have decided to race for the exits. They have decided to leave without doing the most fundamental job Congress is expected to do; that is, pass the spending bills, pass the appropriations bills so our Government can continue to perform the valuable functions which are their responsibility.

To call this Congress a do-nothing Congress would slight Harry Truman's original 1948 do-nothing Congress. The congressional scholar Thomas Mann pointed out that even that do-nothing Congress of 1948 did pass the Marshall Plan, and that was certainly historic and noteworthy.

According to Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein, this Congress worked less than 100 days this year. It is like the average person who works across America showing up for work 2 days a week. Would you expect to get a full paycheck, would you expect to get praise from your boss if you worked 2 days a week instead of 5? The 100 days was less than any other Congress in our lifetimes. For at least 25 of those days, incidentally, there were no votes scheduled before 6:30 in the evening, so they were really more like half days or

quarter days. Yet during that period of time, this Congress refused to increase the minimum wage for millions of American workers, who got up this morning, and every single morning, to clean the rooms and bus the tables and wash the dishes and prepare the food for America, at a minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour.

For 10 straight years, this Congress has refused to give those people, struggling at the lowest end of income in America, an increase in the minimum wage. And for 10 years, Congress has voted itself a pay raise during that period of time to the tune of \$30,000, saying no to minimum wage workers and yes to Members of Congress—another illustration of how this Republican Congress lost its way and forgot the values that should bind us together as Americans.

Well, the Democrats heard the message voters sent last month. We are ready to work hard for the American people, as hard as they work for their own families. But let's be clear. It is not going to be easy to clean up the financial mess of 12 years of Republican control of Congress.

We wanted to start off the 110th Congress, the next Congress, by working on urgent challenges, such as health care and making it more affordable, helping middle-class families pay for college, and we will focus on those. But at the same time, we have to finish the unfinished work of this Republican Congress.

The last time a new majority party took charge of both Houses, in 1994, the Democrats passed every single appropriations bill by October 1, which is the deadline. That marked the last time all these bills were passed on time, by the way.

Now that the Democrats are taking over both Houses, will the Republicans finish their work before leaving town? Sadly, they will not. It is a fitting end to the do-nothing Congress. They will not only do nothing this year, they will do less when it comes to meeting their constitutional responsibility.

Refusing to work on this year's budget is just the tip of the iceberg. The increase in our national debt left behind by this Republican Congress and this administration and the deterioration of our fiscal health are a matter of public record. The President likes to say we are on track to "cut the deficit in half" by the time he leaves office.

But, as Paul Harvey says, let's go to the rest of the story. First, there was no national deficit when President Bush took office. President Clinton eliminated the deficit and we were paying down our national debt.

Second, this year's \$248 billion deficit, which the White House points to as a source of pride, is still nearly as large as the largest deficit under the first President Bush, which was, until this President Bush, the largest deficit in U.S. history.

Third, and most important, that \$248 billion figure for this year's deficit is

not a true reflection of fiscal reality. It does not include the interest we have to pay on all of that borrowing, nor does it include all the funds that have been raided from the Social Security trust fund that will have to be paid back. When you add up all of that, we do not have a national deficit of \$248 billion; our deficit is \$546 billion, more than twice what the President admits.

If you want to understand how big a hole the Republicans are leaving behind after this Congress, look at our national debt. Why? Because when you sit down with your family's finances, what do you really worry about? How many new charges you put on your credit card in the last month or the total amount you owe on that credit card? It is the total amount of the debt that matters. The total amount of debt on our national credit card today is \$8.5 trillion—\$3 trillion more today than when President Bush took office 6 years ago. That is \$30,000 in debt for every man, woman, and child in America.

Think about this fact: Under President Bush, America has borrowed more money from foreign governments to keep our ship of state afloat, borrowed more money than all of the Presidents in the history of the United States combined. And who are the creditors? China, Japan, many others—the same countries that, sadly, are showing an advantage when it comes to trading with the United States.

The Nation's fiscal situation is difficult. If we continue to follow the Republican playbook, it would only get worse. By 2011, the national debt would grow to \$11.6 trillion. That is nearly \$40,000 in debt for every American. It is a debt tax that is being left by this Republican Congress. We cannot sustain this level of debt. David Walker of the Government Accountability Office recently said:

The status quo is unacceptable and unsustainable, and anybody who tells you—whether they be Republican, Democrat, or Independent—that we can solve this problem without having to reform entitlement programs, re-engineering the base of discretionary spending, and have additional tax revenues—anybody who says that we are not going to have to do all three of those is not telling you the truth. It's as simple as that.

The American people deserve honest budgeting and a restoration of the "pay as you go principle"—not more out-of-control deficits. The American people deserve better than a Congress that votes itself a pay raise and continues to vote that the minimum wage stay without any increase.

Americans want ethical standards for Congress that are tough and enforced, a plan to protect our country with the 9/11 Commission recommendations, help in paying for college for working families, lower prices for prescription drugs, Federal support for stem cell research, a real national energy plan, and much more. They deserve a Congress that works as hard as Americans work themselves.

Sadly, this Congress is going to be AWOL, absent without leave. It will